

Security? Not in a rock band!

Wishbone Ash's Steve Upton tells Valerie Mabbs

DURING 1972 alone Wishbone Ash made three trips to the States to undertake extensive tours. And, as might be expected, when I met Steve Upton he was relaxing in London in between two visits to the States.

The group had decided that two months in America would be more bearable if split by a short return to London when the boys could at least snatch a little time with their wives.

"Thankfully America is catching up with Wishbone Ash," says Steve, who explains that the current tour is the group's sixth in that country. "It's always hard for an English band to make it there unless one has a hit single or album. Now we have a good hard following. If you'd have asked me where they were situated before this tour I'd have said mostly down south, but now everywhere we play seems to be good."

Wishbone Ash are now headlining on their tours to audiences averaging about 4,000 per venue. They admit that they haven't yet reached the stage when they could justify being top of the bill at 12,000 seaters, but the audience reaction they create indicates that they are steadily moving towards that goal.

The band are very much a people's band. Over the years they have been steadily working, gradually building their audiences until they reached the point when, with one swift swoop, they shot into

the upper reaches of the album charts with Argus.

"It's true we gained popularity through our audiences, and we haven't been hyped in the press," Steve agreed. "We wouldn't be in America at all if it wasn't for the people in England who've supported us so much. We've worked — without sounding violins and bringing on the flowers — very hard, and a lot, in England and we've put ourselves out to give people the chance to see the band."

Success

"We were on the road for nine months before we recorded an album, and it was a big success... a top 20 album. Then Pilgrimage came next followed by Argus which made everyone say 'this is it' — that all took a matter of two years. We've never been over-exposed as far as the press is concerned, we've just made a gradual progression."



Wishbone: a people's band

The latest development for Wishbone has been the inclusion of tracks which Steve describes as "songs" on their album Wishbone Four — released this week.

"They've been written

as songs," he explains. "There's a lot more concentrations on lyrics with them, as well as vocals. Before Argus we tended to be very much an instrumental band, but that's changing now."

I wondered if this meant that Wishbone would be forced to alter their on stage act to a great degree.

"I'd agree that it could if we were just doing material from this album," Steve told me. "But we play tracks from every album we've made because it keeps the high points and mellow points in the act, and also because our audiences want to hear them."

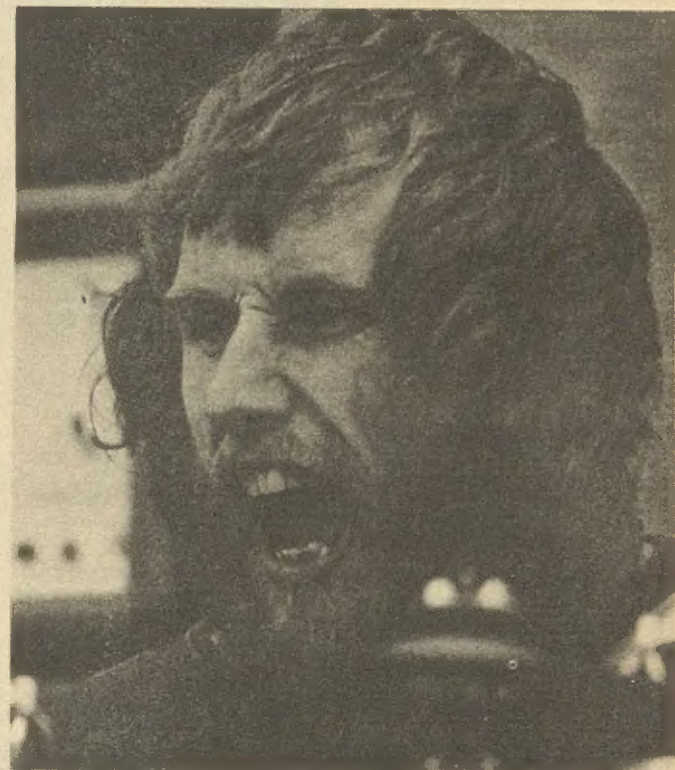
"People shout out for Phoenix from the first album... OK we could say we're not going to do it, but after all people come to hear you play your music, and that's part of it."

Loyalty

It could be thought that it's easy for Wishbone Ash to talk in such terms... but in fact they're showing their loyalty, to their English fans particularly, in a different way.

In June they plan to tour around Britain — to make up for the six months they have been away — and at the same time they will be recording the concerts for a live album.

"It seemed an obvious and natural thing to do the recording in England," Steve told me. "We feel sorry that we haven't worked here for a while."



Steve Upton

Wishbone will be using the Stones mobile truck to record with — "the only one around," says Steve, and when I remind him that Ronnie Lane has invested in what is, apparently, a good studio, he adds: "Yes, a wise move."

So what, I wondered is Mr. Upton investing his cash in.

"When I get some money I'll invest it," he says. "We're not paupers, but all I've got is a flat in Fulham and my Beetle! In this band we all plan ahead as far as our music is concerned; it's different from say, putting out a single and it hits number one, then you say, hey far out I'm a pop star."

"That never was my idea of being famous at

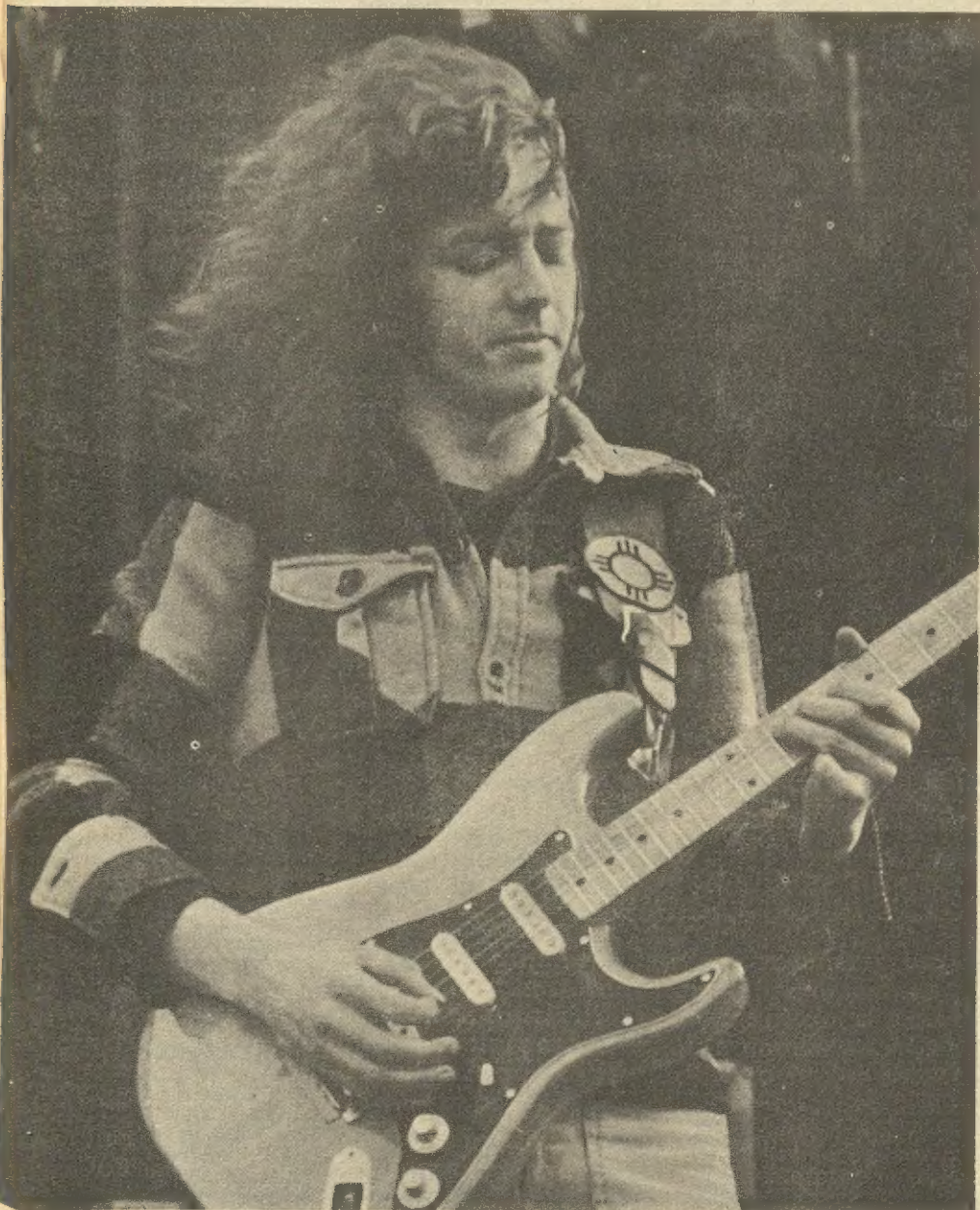
all. I just found myself with a bunch of guys who wanted to form a band, and I wanted to play, although I didn't know anything about playing. I never thought my ambition is this or that... I just learnt how to play drums and followed it through from there."

It's a follow through that has proved to be a great success story, but says Steve:

"I don't think being famous in a rock band gives you security... I don't think that's the criteria for doing it."

So what, I wondered, might Steve consider as a position of security.

"Hmm, I don't know. But it's not being in a rock band!"



Ted Turner